



CONSERVATION UPDATE 2000 ROD GRAMS

UNITED STATES SENATOR ■ MINNESOTA

Dear Friends:

Since my election to Congress in 1992, I've been an advocate for balancing the need for environmental protection with our reliance upon economic growth to maintain our standard of living. Far too often, those two laudable goals are intermixed in combative rhetoric that only serves the extremes in our society.

In Minnesota, we have a unique understanding of the value of both rural and urban areas. We're perhaps alone in our diversity of culture, opinion, landscape, and way of life. That's why issues of environmental concern are so important to us and why we must be ever vigilant of the consequences of our actions.

The issues and initiatives you'll find in this newsletter represent only a small portion of the matters we're currently addressing in the United States Senate. They're issues I believe are important to people throughout our great state.

I hope you'll find this newsletter helpful toward your understanding of what's happening in your nation's capitol. I welcome your comments, both positive and negative, and encourage you to contact my office at any time with your thoughts and concerns. I often say that Minnesotans are the true experts on the issues, and I rely upon you for guidance.

Sincerely,

Rod Grams
United States Senator

ETHANOL AND MTBE

Earlier this year, I joined several of my Senate colleagues in writing to President Clinton regarding the current controversy over the use of Methyl-Tertiary-Butyl-Ether (MTBE) in the Reformulated Gasoline Program (RFG). Because of environmental concerns with MTBE, some in Congress are calling for the elimination of the oxygen standard in the RFG. That's why I asked President Clinton to maintain the oxygen standard and to look to ethanol to fill the void. I've also signed on to legislation that would phase out the use of MTBE over three years while retaining the oxygen standard and its environmental benefits. Finally, I recently met with Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and EPA Administrator Carol Browner to personally ask them to leave the oxygen requirement in place and to let ethanol take the place of MTBE. I believe the RFG program has been very successful in reducing pollution in our nation's most polluted areas. In the cases of Chicago and Milwaukee, ethanol has been a key to that success. I can't imagine a scenario that would merit revoking ethanol's benefits in those areas, and I will continue to push to make sure we not only maintain ethanol markets, but grow them for the future. I look forward to ensuring that Minnesota's commitment to ethanol is protected in the coming months and years.

GRAND PORTAGE NATIONAL MONUMENT

I recently forwarded a request to Senate appropriators seeking over \$4.5 million for the construction of a Heri-





The effects of the July 4th storm near the BWCA.

tage Center at the Grand Portage National Monument in northeastern Minnesota. Grand Portage is the oldest and largest National Monument in the National Park System without a visitor's center. It is interesting to note that Grand Portage has higher visitation rates than almost one third of our nation's other National Monuments with visitor's centers of their own. This important funding would be used to operate a year-round Heritage Center containing an information desk, exhibits, Ojibwe heritage displays, a 47-seat auditorium, and administrative space for the Monument's staff. The Heritage Center enjoys overwhelming support in northeastern Minnesota, including the Friends of Grand Portage, the Grand Portage Band of Minnesota Chippewa, and the Cook County Economic Development Advisory. I look forward to the approval of these funds and the construction of the Heritage Center for the use and enjoyment of many generations of Minnesotans.

PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES (PILT)

As most Americans are aware, the federal government doesn't pay property taxes to counties and localities for land that it owns. Because many northern Minnesota counties contain large amounts of federally owned land, this lack of tax revenue places tremendous pressures on counties trying to meet the most basic needs of both residents and visitors. In order to make up the difference in lost tax revenue, the federal government is supposed to pay counties a set amount of money, called payments in lieu of taxes (PILT), to fund basic services such as roads. Regrettably, Congress has been sorely under-funding the PILT program for many years. To address this problem, I recently requested that Congress begin increasing PILT

funding by at least \$20 million each year until the program is fully funded. These crucial dollars would help counties fund, on behalf of the federal government, many critical infrastructure services – including police, search and rescue, fire fighting, road maintenance, and garbage collection.

REVERSING IRS TAXES ON CRP RENTAL PAYMENTS

When I read that the IRS not only pursued, but won, its case to apply Social Security taxes to CRP rental income, I was outraged. At a time when farmers are in distress and the Congress is pursuing avenues to help farmers through these difficult times, it is ridiculous that the IRS would be in court attempting to force new taxes on farmers. If this decision is allowed to stand, it will burden Minnesota farmers with millions of dollars in back taxes, and additional time and money spent amending past tax returns and protecting themselves from further fines and penalties. In fact, CRP rental income in Minnesota amounted to over \$63 million in 1999 alone. That is why I've joined a bi-partisan coalition of Senators in introducing legislation to reverse this unjust decision and prevent the IRS from taking additional money from farmers who put their land into the Conservation Reserve Program. Congress never intended CRP payments to be subject to self-employment taxes. That's why I'm committed to reversing this ruling for farm families and I'm confident we'll prevail.

RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAMS

As a member of the Senate Renewables and Efficiency Caucus, I recently joined a number of my Senate colleagues in seeking additional money for renewable energy programs in next year's Energy Department funding bill. Our letter requested significant increases for solar, wind, biomass, hydrogen, geothermal and hydropower research and development programs. Minnesota is home to many of these technologies, especially with the growth of wind generation in the western part of our state. With gasoline prices reaching their highest level in decades and our reliance on foreign oil on the rise, at no time has investment in renewable energy research and development been more appropriate. I've long believed that we must continue to invest in renewable energy programs because of their value to rural Minnesota, the environment, and our nation's energy security. I'll continue working with energy interests in Minnesota to protect our nation's commitment to renewable energy programs well into the future.

STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

When the issues of timber harvesting and sound forest management are brought into the public debate, it's often assumed that federal dollars are spent only on federal lands. However, our nation is home to roughly 490 million acres of non-federal forests. These forests, owned by states, counties and private landowners, are crucial to a full range of resource-related activities, including recreation and timber supply. To promote sound management on these non-federal lands, Congress provides yearly funding to a number of State and Private Forestry programs. The State and Private Forestry programs take a voluntary, incentive-based approach to conservation. By working with State Foresters, land trusts, and community groups, these programs reach out to the nation's nine million private forest landowners, as well as urban and rural communities, to increase their capacity to manage their forests and tree resources. These programs also protect these lands from fire, insects, and disease. That's why I was proud to join a significant, bi-partisan group of my colleagues in writing to the Senate Appropriations Committee in support of millions of dollars in increased funding for these important programs. I look forward to seeing this funding at work in Minnesota and across the country improving the management of our nation's non-federal forests.

BWCA STORM DAMAGE

The July 4 storm in northern Minnesota did tremendous damage to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) and created countless difficulties for the many homeowners and resort owners who live and work in the area. Sadly, the enormous amount of downed timber in the region will soon become overwhelmed by disease and eventually dry up, creating an unusually high threat of catastrophic fires for many years to come. I recently wrote to the Senate Appropriations Committee seeking millions of dollars in additional funding for the Superior and Chippewa National Forests. That funding will be crucial to: the removal of significant and substantial hazardous fuels; fire suppression efforts; environmental analysis and decision support required under NEPA to move forward with recovery efforts; mitigation of resource damage and hazard removal in the BWCA; opening and restoring 175 miles of hiking trails; rehabilitation and restoration of numerous roads and facilities; reforestation efforts across most of the damaged areas; and rehabilitation and restoration of shorelines to maintain water quality. I'm hopeful this funding will be approved and put to quick use in and around the areas most damaged by this terrifying storm.

A Closer Look:

STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF NATIONAL PARK WEEK – APRIL 13, 2000

Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak for a few minutes about National Park Week and the value of National Parks to our nation's citizens.

As families and individuals throughout our nation know, America's national parks are the envy of the world and considered by many to be our national treasures. In our nation's parks, wildlife flourish, scenic beauty remains abundant, and families escape the pressures of everyday life. Our parks are truly one of our nation's best investments -- an investment that will provide generations of Americans with the same recreational and educational opportunities we now enjoy.

President Clinton has designated April 17-23, 2000, as National Park Week. The National Park Service now estimates that over 285 million Americans visit our 378 national parks every year. At each site, visitors find themselves confronted with important moments in our nation's history, wonderful natural scenic sites, and cultural treasures which remind us of our distinguished, and sometimes difficult, past. Our parks, in many ways, are a microcosm of our nation and of ourselves, and they continue to document for future generations those qualities about America, which must be preserved for eternity.

In the 105th Congress, I was proud that Congress took a significant step forward in updating the management of our Nation's parks and improving visitor services by passing the "Vision 2020 National Park System Restoration Act," a bill I cosponsored. The Vision 2020 Bill,



authored by Senator Craig Thomas of Wyoming, is a common sense approach to improving both the management and facilities of national parks by bringing everyone to the table and seeking consensus. The passage of the Vision 2020 bill was an important first step toward bringing accountability to park management, addressing the tremendous backlog of park projects, and improving visitor services.

I was also proud to obtain \$2 million in last year's appropriations bills for the National Park Service's portion of the Mississippi River National Center in Minnesota's new Science Museum. The exhibit will include information on the importance of the Mississippi River to Minnesota's array of interests. This is a partnership between the Park Service and the Science Museum that will give Minnesotans a greater appreciation for all aspects of recreation and commerce on the Mississippi River.

My home state of Minnesota is home to five units of the National Park Service. They are Voyageurs National Park, which on April 8 celebrated its 25th anniversary, Pipestone National Monument, Grand Portage National Monument, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and the Saint Croix National Riverway. I've urged Minnesotans to visit these sites during this week and to gain a greater appreciation for opportunities they offer.

Mr. President, our parks remain one of America's most important legacies for future generations and a constant reminder of the progress, splendor, and triumphs of our past.

CONCLUSION

Your input is vital to the success of these and other initiatives Congress may consider, and, as always, I encourage you to contact me with your comments and suggestions.

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